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SPAIN MOVES TOWARD DEMOCRACY

AUDCR: VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY DISCUSSES THE HISTORIC VOTE TAKEN THURSDAY IN THE SPANISH PARLIAMENT:

VOICE: SPAIN TOOK A BIG STEP TOWARD PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY ON THURSDAY WHEN THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT---THE CORTES---APPROVED A REFORM BILL PROVIDING FOR POPULAR ELECTIONS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT. IN DOING SO, IT EFFECTIVELY ENDED ALMOST FORTY YEARS OF DICTATORSHIP AND OPENED A NEW ERA FOR SPAIN.

IT WAS A REMARKABLE ACTION FROM ANY PERSPECTIVE. AFTER ALL IT IS NOT EVERY DAY THAT A PARLIAMENT VOTES ITSELF OUT OF EXISTENCE. FURTHERMORE, THE PARLIAMENT WHICH TOOK THIS HISTORIC STEP OF SELF-DISSOLUTION WAS COMPOSED OF MEMBERS APPOINTED BY OR APPROVED BY THE LATE GENERAL FRANCO. AND THE FACT THAT, ACCORDING TO SPANISH OPINION POLLS, MOST OF THEM WOULD LOSE IN A FUTURE ELECTION SERVES TO FURTHER EMPHASIZE THE UNUSUAL NATURE OF THURSDAY'S ACTION. IT WAS THE KIND OF PARLIAMENT WHICH, ACCORDING TO THE NORMAL RULES OF POLITICAL LOGIC, OUGHT TO HAVE REJECTED THE REFORM BILL PRESENTED BY PRIME MINISTER ADOLFO SUAREZ. INSTEAD, THEY VOTED OVERWHELMINGLY IN FAVOR OF THE BILL, WHOSE FIRST ARTICLE CONTAINED THESE SIGNIFICANT WORDS: "DEMOCRACY IN THE SPANISH STATE IS BASED ON THE SUPREMACY OF THE LAW AND THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF THE PEOPLE." (OPT) PASSAGE OF THE BILL WAS A VICTORY FOR THE PRIME MINISTER AND FOR KING JUAN CARLOS, WHO AGREED A YEAR AGO TO MOVE SPAIN ON THE ROAD TO DEMOCRACY AND PICKED MR. SUAREZ AS THE MAN TO DO THE JOB. BUT IT WAS ALSO A VICTORY FOR THE SPIRIT OF COMPROMISE AND THE FORCES OF MODERATION. IN A LARGER SENSE, IT WAS A VICTORY FOR ALL SPAIN. (END OPT)

DEMOCRACY, HOWEVER, NEVER COMES EASILY, AND THE ROAD AHEAD IS NOT A SMOOTH ONE. ELECTION PROCEDURES MUST BE AGREED UPON; AND AFTER THE ELECTION A CONSTITUTION MUST BE WRITTEN AND ACCEPTED; AND AFTER THAT SPAIN MUST BEGIN THE UNENDING EFFORT TO MAKE DEMOCRACY WORK AND TO AVOID THE POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION OR POLARIZATION WHICH HAVE MADE IT SO DIFFICULT TO FUNCTION IN SOME OTHER COUNTRIES. THOSE WHO RECALL THE PASSIONATE POLITICAL DIFFERENCES OF THE NINETEEN-THIRTIES AND THE BITTER MEMORIES OF THE CIVIL WAR MAY BE INCLINED TOWARD SKEPTICISM. BUT OTHERS ARE POINTING OUT THAT THERE IS A NEW GENERATION OF SPANIARDS MORE CONCERNED WITH THE FUTURE THAN THE PAST.

CERTAINLY ONE OF SPAIN'S GOALS TODAY IS FULL RECONCILIATION WITH THE REST OF EUROPE. IN THIS RESPECT, IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT ON THURSDAY THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION ASSEMBLY COMMENDED SPAIN FOR MOVING TOWARD DEMOCRACY AND INVITED IT TO SEND OBSERVERS TO FUTURE N.A.T.O. GATHERINGS. THUS, THE VOTE TAKEN IN MADRID THURSDAY MAY BE SEEN AS HAVING POTENTIAL BENEFICIAL EFFECTS NOT ONLY FOR SPAIN ITSELF BUT ALSO FOR THE CAUSE OF WESTERN UNITY.